



Public-private Partnership Conserves Sierra Valley Ranches Conservation Corridor protects working landscapes and nationally significant California watershed region

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Lemon Canyon Ranch and Calpine Meadow Ranch in Sierra Valley are now protected by a permanent conservation agreement, the Pacific Forest Trust announced TRUCKEE, Calif. —Sierra Valley's scenic working landscapes will stay that way with the permanent conservation of two historic ranch properties in the nation's largest alpine valley, the Pacific Forest Trust announced.

Located just north of Lake Tahoe, Lemon Canyon Ranch and Calpine Meadow Ranch — which span 1,400- and 237-acres respectively — are permanently protected from development through the use of conservation easements, purchased by PFT with landowner support and key funding from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and California's Wildlife Conservation Board.

“These projects in magnificent Sierra Valley are important to the heritage and the value of the working landscapes in the Sierra,” said SNC Executive Officer Jim Branham. “Not only do they preserve the ecological health of the land and the watershed, they preserve the history of Sierra Valley as well.”

“The future of California's forests and ranch lands is uncertain as hundreds of family-owned properties change hands over the next two decades,” said John Donnelly, executive director of the Wildlife Conservation Board. “Sierra Valley presents an exciting opportunity to conserve the ecological and cultural heritage of a historic ranching community in the nation's largest alpine valley.”

The new working lands easements will prevent development or subdivision of the properties while keeping the lands in private ownership and productive use for ranching and forestry. They are located at either end of a 4,470-acre conservation corridor the Pacific Forest Trust (PFT) created by conserving a series of ranches along the valley's southern edge, which play a critical role in collecting and delivering approximately half of the valley's water supply. Mountain snowmelt flows into the valley's extensive wetland system, lush meadows and pastures that feed the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Feather River, a federally designated Wild and Scenic River. This major Sacramento River tributary sends water downstream to 22 million Californians.

As the Sierra's largest alpine wetlands system, Sierra Valley supports the greatest concentration and diversity of waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors in the region. Its pastures and rich forests have a long history of cattle ranching, timber production and are home to more than 250 species of wildlife.

Lemon Canyon Ranch is situated on the southeastern end of PFT's conservation corridor. The ranch is adjacent to the Tahoe National Forest and Jamison Ranch, another PFT easement project in development. The Lemon Canyon conservation easement protects 3.5 miles of Lemon Canyon Creek and its tributaries, which provide significant water flows into Sierra Valley. The easement also connects the ranch's diverse forest and meadow habitats with other nearby public and conserved private lands to create more than 5,800 contiguous acres of protected land and associated migration routes for hundreds of species, including the bald eagle, Sierra Nevada red fox and greater sandhill crane.

"I'm proud to join Artie Strang, Attilio Genasci, Russell Turner and so many other Sierra Valley ranchers in protecting the extraordinary natural resources of the Valley for future generations," said Lemon Canyon Ranch owner Lucy Blake. "I think we all feel lucky to have lived and worked this little piece of heaven on Earth, and want to do what we can to keep it just like it is, or even improve it."

"Completing these easements represents significant momentum in our work to assure a sustainable, natural resource-based future for this beautiful and productive valley," added PFT Co-CEO Connie Best. "This conservation corridor will be a much-needed brake on encroaching development in the region and will assure wildlife an unbroken habitat corridor from the valley floor up to the forested ridge top."

Located within commuting distance to growing population centers such as Truckee, Calif., and Reno, Nev., people are attracted to southern Sierra Valley for its relatively inexpensive land prices and rural beauty. The Sierra County economy relies greatly on tourism and recreation, which has fueled second home and resort development, including golf courses, in the vicinity.

While development threats are reduced until the economy rebounds, the lull won't last forever. The lagging economy did, however, make it easier for PFT to work with local land developers N.C. Brown Development, Inc., which had planned to build 30 homes on Calpine Meadow Ranch, located within the southern conservation corridor. After the housing market collapsed Brown Development contacted PFT to pursue conservation of the scenic 237-acre working cattle ranch, which encompasses 168 acres of wet meadows surrounded by forests and includes 2.5 miles of Fletcher Creek, Spring Channel and numerous tributaries.

PFT was able to step in to forestall future development and conserve the land in perpetuity with a working lands conservation easement, which leaves the land in private ownership while ensuring it will remain intact and productive. Preventing subdivision of the land and development of the property will address threats to the land's water quality and wildlife habitat by dedicating the property to relatively natural forest and meadow habitats and its traditional use of agriculture.

"This was very important for the larger Sierra County community," said Norm Brown, who owns the Calpine property with his business partners in the Meadow Ranch LLC. "We've had many people tell us they wanted the property to remain a productive agricultural operation where cattle continue to graze in this beautiful open space."

The Lemon Canyon and Calpine easements were acquired with support from the landowners as well as state funders SNC, which donated \$1 million to help cover the costs of both easements and WCB, which awarded \$1,052,000 toward the Lemon Canyon easement costs. The owners of both properties contributed to the projects by generously selling the conservation easements to PFT for substantially less than their appraised value. A grant from the Sierra Business Council provided invaluable support for project development costs.

“PFT is so grateful to Lucy Blake, Norm Brown and his partners and all of our funders and other local landowner partners for working with us to complete this unique Sierra Valley conservation corridor,” Best said. “This is an inspiring example of what can be accomplished when public agencies, non-profits and private landowners work together to invest in the future of our precious natural resources, including the abundant, clean supplies of water we all depend on.”

— Submitted to aedgett@sierrasun.com

About the Pacific Forest Trust

Since 1993, the Pacific Forest Trust (PFT) has been dedicated to conserving and sustaining America's vital, productive forest landscapes. Working with forest owners, communities and our partners we advance innovative, incentive-based strategies to safeguard our nation's forests and their wealth of public benefits, including clean water, sustainably harvested wood, green jobs, wildlife habitat and a livable climate. Recognized as a national leader in sustainable forestry and conservation, PFT has provided expert advice and other services to the owners and managers of more than 10 million acres of forestland from coast to coast. To date, PFT has directly conserved more than 50,000 acres of forestland in California, Oregon and Washington valued at more than \$160 million. Visit www.pacificforest.org.

About the Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Created in 2004, the SNC is a state agency whose mission is to improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada region. In its first five years, the SNC, which receives no general fund tax dollars, has awarded approximately \$40 million in grants for projects including fuels reduction, conservation easements and acquisitions, and watershed and habitat restoration. Funding for these projects comes from Proposition 84 passed by voters in 2006.